

Aaron Keel

Acts of Kindness

All I owned was a couple changes of clothes, a few notepads, an MP3 player loaded with punk and hip-hop, and my Skull Candy headphones. I carried it all in an army green backpack and traveled the streets of Phoenix on my skateboard, which also served as a pillow. After a few months of winter cold followed by a hot spring, a rage started building up inside of me. I started hating the world. I already hated myself and didn't have the balls to end my self-loathing, so I just skated.

One day in the thick of my hatred, I was practicing hard flips and 360 flips in the local mall parking lot sweating out some of my anger. Over and over I would pop the board into the air, watch it spin underneath my feet, then try to catch it mid-air right on top of the bolts before slamming the board back down to the asphalt and riding away. On one of my attempts at perfecting this, my left foot fell too far to the back, right on the tip of the tail, and the board snapped.

I yelled. I cursed. I sat down there on the hot asphalt, letting the sweat drip off my forehead into my eyes. That piece of wood on wheels was one of the few pieces of happiness I had left. And a friend at that. I looked up to the sky. There were no answers in the blue. And then I looked to the mall with a Van's Skateshop tucked away in the back corner. My pockets were empty, but somewhere deep inside me there was a glimmer of hope shining as I picked up my backpack and the broken deck and walked to the air-conditioned shop.

I walked into the store, my eyes filling with shiny new decks hanging on the walls like psychedelic posters in a burned-out hippie's room. A salesman was leaning over the counter wearing an old FUCT t-shirt with Bert from Sesame Street standing behind a bent-over Ernie with both of their pants down around their ankles.

"Looks like you have a casualty on your hands," he says.

"Yeah," I mumbled not quite looking in his eyes.

"Well, what's up? Looks like you need a new deck."

“That’s the problem. I have no money. I’m homeless, and my fucking board just broke. Do you guys have any old decks lying around that you’re going to throw out or maybe any friends who might have a deck they’re willing to give up for a man a little shit out?” I ask, practically begging as I bounce from foot to foot nervously.

“You know what, dude, I have this great Cowtown deck in here that some kid just switched out. There’re no cracks or chips, and it’s not warped at all,” he says, reaching under the counter, pulling out the deck. “Let me get you some tools and you can go ahead and put it together right now.”

“I can have this for nothing?” I ask, holding up the almost new Cowtown deck and looking for some defect to let me know this is all a cruel joke.

“Hell, yeah, buddy. We’ve all been there before, and I’m always willing to help out a fellow skater. Let me know if you need any help, and there’s extra hardware in this box if you need some,” he said as his teeth shone like the halos above the heads of angels in a religious painting.

I put together the board, thanked him, and walked out of there. I started up conversations with people again. I knew then there was still hope. The anger I felt before vanished, and the sun shone brighter, at least, for a couple of weeks.